



Fair Political Practices Commission

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **FPPC discusses challenges of Internet political campaigning** *Internet commission presents report, suggests limited role for regulators*

Fair Political Practices Commission Chair Liane Randolph today praised the recommendations of the Bipartisan California Commission on Internet Political Practices, which presented its findings to the FPPC at its monthly meeting in Sacramento today (Feb. 10).

“The commission makes excellent recommendations about the importance of furthering public communication without regulatory interference,” she said. “I appreciate the commission’s encouragement that California and the FPPC take the lead in defining the framework for the intersection between political expression over the Internet and our current regulation of political activity.”

The findings were presented to the FPPC today during its monthly meeting by Internet Commissioner Henry Wolfgang Carter of H.W. Carter Consulting, LLC, a former assistant general counsel and vice-president for E\*TRADE Group, Inc., who was appointed to the commission by Senate President Pro Tempore John Burton (D-San Francisco), and by Matt Grossmann, a Ph.D candidate at the University of California, Berkeley, who researched and wrote much of the report. The commission was chaired by Geoff Cowan, dean of the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication.

“Widespread cynicism and substantially decreasing voter participation echo the overall disengagement in political and public life by our nation’s citizenry,” Cowan said in a news release from the commission. “In the end, the benefits of engaging citizens in the democratic process through the Internet will far outweigh any potential dangers.”

**A copy of the report is available on the FPPC website. Go to the home page at [www.fppc.ca.gov](http://www.fppc.ca.gov) and click on the “Bipartisan California Commission on Internet Political Practices” button.**

The Internet Commission was created by AB 2720, by former Assemblyman Keith Olberg (R-Victorville). The commission consists of members appointed by the leadership of the Legislature, the FPPC, the secretary of state and the governor. It has examined issues posed by Internet campaign activity in light of the goals and purposes of the Political Reform Act of 1974.

According to the report, “(The) Commission believes that the Internet and associated new technologies, if allowed to flourish, increasingly will be used in ways that improve the quality of campaigns and elections.” The Internet Commission’s investigation of current online political activities yields several findings, including:

- Online political activities become more widespread and more tactically advanced with each election.
- The Internet, whether or not changing the outcome, is changing the way people participate in the political process.
- Internet users have access to a wider scope of independent sources of political information than users of traditional media.
- The changes in political discourse brought by the Internet are still in their initial stages; citizens are beginning to look online for new chances to participate.

The report also includes a survey of potential regulatory implications and offers some broad recommendations for adapting a regulatory framework that enhances political dialogue and limits the potential for abusive practices.

- Create an exemption for online voter education.
- Allow “fan sites,” political parody, and criticism without necessitating disclaimers or reporting requirements.
- Provide considerable latitude for candidates and individual organizations that wish to use new technology such as peer-to-peer marketing and hyperlinks.

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